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**FIFTH AND SIXTH GRADE LEARNERS' KNOWLEDGE OF
ENGLISH SPEAKING COUNTRIES**

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Abstract

Culture plays a significant role in a foreign language classroom. The present research aimed to give a brief overview of fifth and sixth grade learners' knowledge of English speaking countries. The main objective was to find out to what extent learners' knowledge corresponded to the requirements of the Estonian National Curriculum for Basic and Upper Secondary School (*Põhikooli ja gümnaasiumi...*, 2002, 2010) and which aspects of culture they knew best. It was also studied whether there were any differences in the girls' and boys' knowledge.

The results revealed that in general the learners' knowledge corresponded to the requirements of the Curriculum. The learners knew best general information of English speaking countries, followed by the holidays and symbols. At the same time recognising countries on the map turned out to be the most difficult task. It also appeared that the girls did better in the test than the boys.

Keywords: teaching culture, knowledge, English speaking countries, assessment

VIIENDA JA KUUENDA KLASSI ÕPILASTE TEADMISED INGLISE KEELT KÕNELEVATE MAADE KOHTA

Resümee

Kultuur mängib olulist rolli keeleõppes. Antud uurimuse eesmärgiks oli anda ülevaade viienda ja kuuenda klassi õpilaste teadmistest inglise keelt kõnelevate maade kohta ja välja selgitada, mil määral vastavad õpilaste teadmised "Põhikooli ja gümnaasiumi riikliku õppekava" (2002, 2010) nõuetele ning millistes valdkondades on õpilaste teadmised kõige paremad. Samuti uuriti, kas tüdrukute ja poiste teadmistes leidub erinevusi.

Uurimuse tulemustest selgus, et õpilaste teadmised vastavad üldjoontes õppekava nõuetele. Kõige paremini teati inglise keelt kõnelevate maade kohta üldist informatsiooni, millele järgnesid pühad ja sümbolid. Vähem teati riikide asukohti kaardil. Lisaks selgus uurimuse tulemustest, et tüdrukute teadmised inglise keelt kõnelevate maade kohta olid paremad kui poiste omad.

Märksõnad: kultuuri õpetamine, teadmised, inglise keelt kõnelevad maad, hindamine

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Introduction

The significance of culture in foreign language teaching has been widely recognised. Brown (2000) is convinced that culture is highly important in the learning of a foreign language because of the intense relationship between language and culture. Cakir (2006) agrees that understanding a language also requires understanding of culture. However, Tseng (2002) argues that culture is often neglected in foreign language teaching or introduced only as a supplementary diversion in the lessons. His idea is supported by Tsou (2005) who maintains that despite the importance of culture in foreign language teaching curricula, it still serves a minor role in a foreign language classroom. Teachers either do not talk about the target culture in their lessons or only deal with limited topics that are given in textbooks. Without knowing how and what to teach, most teachers may avoid teaching culture after all. The latter does not necessarily apply to Estonian foreign language teachers. A study conducted by Saluveer (2004) reveals that generally Estonian teachers consider teaching culture important and try to integrate it in their lessons.

Because of the central role that culture serves in a foreign language classroom, it is necessary to examine definitions of culture as well as the essential aspects of teaching it. Thus, the present work gives a brief overview of the goals, content, methods and sources as well as assessment tools for culture instruction.

The definition of culture

The word ‘culture’ is difficult to define as it embraces different aspects of human life. In the broadest sense ‘culture’ is defined as a way people live. So, Brown (2000, p.176) states that “culture is the way of life. It is the context within which we exist, think, feel, and relate to others. It is the “glue” that binds a group of people together”. Seelye defines culture as “a frame of reference consisting of learned patterns of behaviour, values, assumptions, and meaning, which are shared to varying degrees of interest, importance, and awareness with members of a group; culture is the story of reality that individuals and groups value and accept as a guide for organizing their lives” (1996, p.9). However, in defining culture one can often come across terms such as “culture with a small c” and “culture with a big C”. Culture with a big C is a traditional view to culture. It includes the humanistic manifestations and contributions such as art, theatre, literature, music and dance. Small c culture, on the other hand focuses on the behavioural

patterns or lifestyles of people. These patterns of behaviour and values are learned and passed through generations and across groups (Seelye, 1996; Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993; Tsou, 2005; Peck, 1998).

Culture and foreign language teaching

Numerous authors have emphasised the important role that culture plays in language learning (Brown, 2000; Hinkel, 1999; Kitao, 2000; Nault, 2006; Pulverness, 2004; Seelye, 1997). According to Hinkel (1999), applied linguistics and language teachers have acknowledged that foreign language can rarely be taught and learned without indicating the culture of the community in which it operates. Brown (2000) claims that language cannot be taught without culture, because language is a part of culture, and culture is a part of language. He stresses that the importance of either language or culture is lost when the two are separated. Seelye (1997) believes that the study of culture and language cannot be taught separately, because learners need proficiency in language and the knowledge of culture to function successfully in another cultural system. He goes on to say that without culture most behaviour would be meaningless and unpredictable. In his opinion the way people speak conveys information about their sex, age, social class, place of residence, their religion and their interest. Pulverness (2004) states that language separated from its cultural roots is inadequate. He argues that foreign language as a neutral code, free of culture, may result in some kind of communication but it is likely to be at best its impoverished form. Nault (2006) maintains that learners must be familiar with the target culture if they want to become truly proficient in the target language. He adds that the manner in which individuals express and interpret messages in their own and other language is heavily influenced by their cultural backgrounds.

The advantages of cultural instruction are well summarised by Kitao (2000). He is convinced that teaching culture will help learners to understand it better, improve international understanding and help them to communicate better with people of different cultures. In addition, teaching culture makes language learning more meaningful, authentic and interesting. It also motivates students to learn foreign languages and help them to understand better themselves and their own culture. Furthermore, teaching culture can change learners' attitudes positively towards the people of target culture and it is definitely a useful part of general education.

According to Politzer (1959, cited in Brooks, 1986), language teachers must be interested in the study of culture not because they necessarily want to teach it but because they have to. He

believes that teaching language without addressing to the culture in which it is used is meaningless, because teachers are teaching symbols to which the learners may attach the wrong or no meaning.

Aims of teaching culture

When the goals of language instruction are thoroughly formulated in national curricula as well as in foreign language syllabi, the aims of teaching culture are not so clearly expressed. Nevertheless, The Estonian National Curriculum (*Põhikooli ja gümnaasiumi...*, 2010) sets the following goals for teaching culture: to develop learners' cultural awareness in communication, to gain knowledge about different cultures, to stimulate learners' interest in other countries and their cultures, to motivate foreign language learning, to make the learners more tolerant and avoid prejudiced attitudes towards the otherness, and lastly, to make learners understand and value other cultures.

At the same time several scholars have been more concrete in setting the objectives for teaching culture. Tavares & Cavalcanti (1996) identify the following aims of cultural instruction: to increase students' awareness and to develop their curiosity towards their own and the target language cultures. In addition, teaching culture should help learners to make comparisons among cultures in order to enrich their experience and to sensitise them to cultural diversity. The latter should be understood and respected but never over- or underestimated. Valette (1986) highlights four cultural aims of language teaching: to develop awareness of and knowledge about the target culture, acquire etiquette of the target culture, understand differences between the target culture and learners' culture and understand the values of the target culture. Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) have proposed their aims for teaching culture:

- to help students to develop an understanding of the fact that all people exhibit culturally-conditioned behaviours;
- to help students to develop an understanding that social variables such as age, sex, social class and place of residence influence the ways in which people speak and behave;
- to help students to become more aware of conventional behaviour in common situations in the target culture;
- to help students to increase their awareness of the cultural connotations of words and phrases in the target language;

- to help students to develop the ability to evaluate and refine generalizations about the target culture, in terms of supporting evidence;
- to help students to develop the necessary skills to locate and organize information about the target culture;
- to stimulate students' intellectual curiosity about the target culture, and to encourage empathy towards its people (pp. 7-8).

To conclude, teaching culture should raise learners' awareness of their own and other cultures as well as develop an appreciation of the otherness around them.

Intercultural competence

When teachers have set clear goals for culture instruction, they should think what exactly to teach students. Sercu (2006) stresses that foreign language learning today should be viewed in an intercultural perspective. According to him, the main objective of foreign language learning is no longer the acquisition of communicative competence but teachers are now required to teach intercultural communicative competence. Moran (2001) defines the latter as "the ability to enter other cultures and communicate effectively and appropriately, establish and maintain relationships, and carry out tasks with people of these cultures" (p 5).

According to Byram, Nichols and Stevens (2001), intercultural competence consists of knowledge, skills and attitudes. *Intercultural attitudes* of the learner are the foundation of intercultural competence. They are described as willingness to leave aside the disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own. Learners must be aware that their values, beliefs and behaviour are not the only possible and correct ones. *Knowledge* is not primarily knowledge about the target culture, but rather knowledge of the interaction of social groups in one's own and in the target language country. According to Byram & Morgan (1994), knowledge can be divided into two levels. The first level is factual knowledge which in turn can be divided into minimal objective knowledge (for example, the date and the main events of the French Revolution) and a more detailed knowledge (for example, the causes and effects of the French Revolution). The second level, the appreciation of the significance of the facts, can be divided into: "description of their emblematic maintenance in contemporary life and explanation of how such emblems underpin culturally shared understandings of their importance" (p.137). They add that the level based on factual knowledge, can be acquired by beginners and intermediate learners. The second

level presupposes the ability to abstract and to analyse. Hence, the second level is only possible at higher cognitive and moral stages, which only learners in upper secondary school and later would normally be able to do. *Skills* are as important as attitudes and knowledge. In addition, learners also need *skills of interpreting and relating* and *skills of discovery and interaction*. The former is the ability to explain a document or event from another culture and relate it to documents and events from one's own. The latter can be defined as the ability to acquire knowledge about the target culture and to use this knowledge in real life practice.

The purpose of teaching intercultural competence is not to change the values of learners, but to make them aware of cultural differences and make them respect the otherness when communicating with people from another culture (Byram, 2001). Furthermore, intercultural competence should not be taught solely in a foreign language classroom. Other subjects such as history, geography and literature can also introduce learners to other worlds and the experience of otherness. Nevertheless, foreign language teaching has the experience of otherness at the centre of its concern as it engages learners with familiar and unfamiliar experience through the medium of foreign language (Byram, 1997).

Cultural knowledge as part of intercultural competence

McKay (2002, cited in Skopinskaja, 2003) states that in order to develop intercultural competence, learners need first to acquire knowledge about the target language community. Krasner (1999) agrees that foreign language skills require some background cultural knowledge. He explains that learners might have difficulties in understanding a foreign text not because of the lack of language skills but because of a missing link in cultural knowledge. Byram (1994) maintains that despite the criticism of background information, it would be wrong to assume that learners do not need it. Actually, it is just the opposite, such information is an indispensable link between cultural and linguistic learning and it should not be viewed as mere background. However, Bassnett (1997) emphasises that learning culture cannot be just acquiring facts and institutions, it must also contain a study of the discourse that shapes them. Fact-based knowledge is definitely significant, but knowledge of cultural diversity involves a great deal more.

According to Tomlinson & Masuhara (2004), cultural knowledge contains information about the characteristics of one's own and other people's cultures. Cultural knowledge is generally external, articulated, static, reduced and stereotypical. It is external because it is received from someone else and articulated because it is reduced to what words can express. It is

static because people do not change it from experience and stereotypical because it refers to general norms rather than specific instances. Cultural knowledge is also reduced because it has been chosen from all the information available and typically it neglects information about variation and exceptions. Information is imparted in the form of facts, generalisations, examples and statistics. The biggest advantage of cultural knowledge is that it can help learners to understand better themselves and other people. However, Tomlinson & Masuhara (ibid.) warn that cultural knowledge can also be incorrect because it is influenced by other people's expertise, integrity and objectivity. It is changing with time and therefore it is often out of date. The information is considerably simplified and it often veils as much as it exposes.

Foreign language theorists do not see eye to eye when it comes to the knowledge that is required for understanding another culture. The knowledge of a culture varies and there is no consensus (Bassnett, 1997). Thus, several attempts have been made to define the content for cultural knowledge that should be integrated into foreign language classroom. Simpson (1997) proposes the cultural knowledge that learners should master at different language levels. Foreign language beginners should know in which countries the target language is spoken and by approximately how many people it is used. Intermediate learners should know basic information about the target language countries, such as capitals, economics (the main industries, products etc). More advanced learners should be able to distinguish between native speakers from different areas and make appropriate conclusions using their cultural knowledge of target language countries.

The English language syllabus in the Estonian National Curriculum (*Põhikooli ja gümnaasiumi...*, 2010) was recently redesigned. The new syllabus has incorporated the intercultural dimension and acknowledges that learners need cultural knowledge in order to communicate successfully with members of other cultures. The new syllabus suggests that by the end of form 3, learners should have acquired basic information about the target country. By the end of form 6, they should be familiar with the symbols, holidays, customs and contemporary social issues of the target language country. They should also gain an insight into well-known historical and cultural events and achievements that are related to the target language country.

When the new curriculum was in the process of being redesigned, it was discussed which cultural themes should be included. Several suggestions were made for cultural instruction and they were summarised in *Riiklike õppekavade materjale* (2006). The latter shifted greater focus

on the culture of the target language and specified the content of cultural knowledge that learners should master in forms 3, 4, 5 and 6. It was suggested that in form 3 learners should acquire knowledge about Great Britain, the Union Jack and Queen Elizabeth II as well as knowledge about famous institutions in London. Students should be familiar with popular proverbs, sayings, nursery rhymes and songs. They should also gain a better insight into social conventions and the topic 'Family' in general. In form 4 pupils should learn about the USA and the parts of the United Kingdom (the head of state, the capitals and the symbols). They should be introduced to popular poems, fairytales and leisure activities. In form 5 the foreign language class should provide information about famous places in London and Washington, natural places, the melodies of the anthems of the United Kingdom and the USA, English and American trademarks and products as well as the school system. Learners should gain insight into folklore and parables, tongue twisters and well-known stories. In form 6 learners should gain an insight into the history of England and America, the Royal Family, the Presidents of the USA as well as famous athletes of England and America. Learners should be introduced to some legends and limericks and healthy lifestyle (*Riiklike õppekava materjale*, 2006). The list of topics presented (see Appendix 1) is by no means exhaustive. Nevertheless, it is a useful guideline for the foreign language teacher.

Different scholars have also suggested topics that cultural knowledge should include. Bassnett (1997) thinks that instruction of culture should contain the following categories: food and cooking customs, holidays, leisure interests, shops and markets, landscape and lot of other areas. She adds that in her opinion there is little need for any fixed list of themes. Generally topics should be chosen to investigate and criticise established cultural stereotypes and teachers should choose topics that take into consideration students' interests. Brooks (1986) offers a list of 62 topics that can be integrated into a foreign language lesson. His list includes topics such as greetings, friendly exchanges, patterns of politeness, festivals, friendship, travelling, health, and beauty (for the whole list see Appendix 2). Byram's (1994) suggests eight broad categories that include topics such as appropriate behaviour, family, school, work, significant historical and contemporary events, population, flora and climate etc (for the whole list see Appendix 3). The aforementioned topics are quite similar to the topics proposed by the Estonian National Curriculum (*Põhikooli ja gümnaasiumi...*, 2010) and *Riiklike õppekavade materjale* (2006).

Language learners need to acquire cultural knowledge in order to communicate and to increase their comprehension in the target language. However, generally foreign language learners are ill-prepared when it comes to the culture of the target language country (Damen, 2003). A survey carried out by Saluveer (2004) among Estonian university and secondary school students proved that their knowledge about the target language country (Britain) was rather limited. Students showed a lack of knowledge in its history, geography and present-day life. Nevertheless, Simpson (1997) believes that learners want to know more about the target language countries. This argument is also supported by the survey conducted by Saluveer. The latter revealed that Estonian students showed great interest in learning more about the youth life, rules of behaviour, music, customs and traditions of the target language country (Saluveer, 2004). Hence, teachers should use their learners' natural curiosity to present more culture-related information in their lessons.

Cultural knowledge is only beneficial to learners if it is taught properly. Byram (1989) stresses that teaching cultural knowledge as an unsystematic approach leaves learners with unstructured information rather than knowledge. He suggests that teachers should determine a logical order that follows sequentially or create a spiral curriculum which takes into consideration levels of complexity and abstraction as well as levels of linguistic learning so that culture is taught simultaneously with language. In addition, any knowledge made available to learners must be a selection that cannot be separated from teaching methods.

Techniques for teaching culture

Foreign languages are mainly taught in school and therefore the classroom has a significant role in creating an authentic environment. It is highly recommended that teachers should decorate the classroom with posters, pictures, maps, signs and realia in order to help students to develop a mental image of the target country. If possible, teachers should find a corner where authentic things such as bus tickets, menus, souvenirs, flags, postcards, etc. can be collected (Peck, 1998; Ruutemets & Saluveer, 2008). Creating an authentic environment should also be considered when celebrating festivals. The latter is a suitable activity for younger learners. Celebrating festivals requires a lot of planning, but it works well as it enables students to actively participate in the cultural heritage of the people whose language they are studying. Peck (1998) suggests several activities for celebrating target culture festivals: putting together a cookbook from target culture

recipes and preparing some of the foods from the cookbook, drawing posters, decorating the room, learning folk songs and dances.

Authentic environment is significant for culture instruction but definitely not enough. It is often recommended that culture instruction should involve a comparison between the learners' own and target language country. According to Byram and Morgan (1994), learners do compare and contrast as part of their general strategies of accommodation and assimilation. They claim that according to the psychological theory, comparison is absolutely necessary, because learners need to become aware of their own culture before they can acknowledge another culture.

In addition, teachers can use a number of techniques in order to teach knowledge about the target language country. Anthony (1963, cited in Brown, 2000) defines technique as "any of a wide variety of exercises, activities, or devices used in the language classroom for realising lesson objectives" (p.171). The choice of techniques depends on what topic is taught. For teaching behavioural patterns *the role-play*, *Total Physical Response* and *the culture assimilator* are considered the most suitable. *The role-play* helps students to overcome cultural "fatigue" (p.4) and it promotes the process of cross-cultural dialogues while at the same time it provides opportunities for oral communication. Role-plays enable students to act out situations that are based on cultural differences. It is suggested that after learning about ways of appropriate behaviour in the target language culture, students could act out a situation in which inappropriate communication is used and other students observe the role and try to identify the reason of miscommunication (Cakir, 2006; Peterson & Coltrane, 2003). *The culture assimilator* was developed for facilitating adjustments to a foreign culture. It is a brief description of a critical incident of cross-cultural interaction that would probably be misunderstood by learners. After the description of the incident, the teacher presents four possible explanations and learners have to select from these possibilities the correct one (Hughes, 1986). *Total Physical Response* or *the audio-motor unit* is a listening exercise where learners respond to carefully constructed list of oral commands. The commands are arranged in an order that will cause students to act out a cultural experience (Hughes, 1986).

Well-known buildings and places can be introduced by using, for example, *the simulation*. The latter is an imaginary trip to the target culture. Learners use the target language and pretend to have a tour and visit different places. Simulations are similar to role plays except simulations take place over an extended period of time. Simulations are also available as computer programs

and on the Internet where learners play an active role by making decisions about a situation's outcome. Thus, simulations are also suitable for learning appropriate behaviour in different places such as restaurants, museums and supermarkets (Celce-Murcia, 1991).

History and geography of the target language country can be taught by using, for example, *project work* and *the scavenger hunt*. *Project work* is a learner-centred activity that gives learners an opportunity to use their language skills in real and challenging situations. Project work requires a great deal of independent work and language skills. However, it is not only meant for advanced students, there are many projects that can be carried out by learners with elementary language skills. Whatever project or whatever language level, it is the teacher's role to get involved in the project and guide learners throughout the project. Learners can gain great benefit from project work. They are given an opportunity to practice the target language. Also, the project enables them to use the language in an authentic context and they have a chance to create something meaningful (Fried-Booth, 1997). *The scavenger hunt* is an Internet-based activity in which learners search for specific information from the Internet in order to accomplish the task developed by the teacher. There are two different types of scavenger hunts. First, the teacher designs a series of questions or requests a series of items for learners to collect and learners use search engines to find the information. Second, the teacher develops a series of questions and gives learners a specific website where they will find answers to the questions (Seamon, 1999).

Last not least, teachers could also use maps and posters to help learners to locate different countries on the map.

Holidays, customs, symbols and contemporary issues of the target language country can be introduced by using the *the slice-of-life-technique*. It is an activity when the teacher presents a small segment of life from the other culture. The short input could be, for example, a song related to the topic or recording of a news item. The advantage of this activity is that it catches learners' attention and arouses interest, as well as, it does not take up valuable class time (Saluveer, 2004).

Brown (2000) maintains that the best teachers are not afraid to take risks and try out new activities in the language classroom. Not all techniques are suitable for every language classroom. Therefore, before and after using a specific technique teachers need to evaluate the activity according to the appropriateness or the feedback from learners and if necessary modify certain aspects of the technique

Authentic material for teaching culture

Textbooks are the main source for teaching culture in Estonia (Saluveer, 2004). Most frequently they focus on the culture of the United Kingdom and give less attention to the other English speaking countries. This argument is supported by a study conducted by Kruus (2007). It revealed that the most frequently used textbooks at primary level in Estonia – “I Love English” series included mainly topics related to the culture of the United Kingdom, while information about Ireland, New Zealand and Australia was rather limited. Furthermore, the study showed that the textbooks mostly contained general information (the name of the country, first language, head of state etc.), national symbols as well as special days of English speaking countries.

As textbooks do not often contain enough material for teaching culture, teachers need to refer to other sources, including authentic material. According to Kramsch the term ‘authentic’ has been used “as a reaction against the prefabricated artificial language of textbooks and instructional dialogues; it refers to the way language is used in non-pedagogic, natural communication” (1993, p.177). Little and Singleton (1988, cited in Kramsch, 1993) define an authentic text as a text that was created to fulfil some social purpose in the language community in which it was produced. Peterson and Coltrane (2003) add that using authentic sources from the native speech community helps to engage students in authentic cultural experience.

There is a wide choice of authentic resources such as the Internet, TV, film and video, newspapers, proverbs, songs and realia to mention just a few that teachers can use to teach culture in the language classroom effectively. The new Estonian National Curriculum (*Põhikooli ja gümnaasiumi...*, 2010) also suggests that more information and communication technology should be used in all subjects. The Internet, TV, film and video provide an opportunity to learn more about the target language countries. *The Internet* offers learners a huge range of material about any subject under the sun. According to Harmer (2001), one of the main advantages of the Internet is that teachers and students have an access to ‘authentic’ English. It can be used efficiently for learner-centred activities such as the simulation (see pp.12-13), the scavenger hunt (see p. 13) and project work (see p. 13). Similarly, *TV, film and video* give learners access to authentic language. According to Genova (2001), children today tend to read less than children ten or twenty years ago, because they prefer to seek for information through the media. Therefore, teachers have to recognise its enormous power and use students’ affinity for television in the classroom in order to help them to become active viewers, instead of passive consumers.

Peterson and Coltrane (2003) maintain that film and television segments enable to see behaviours that are not obvious in texts. They go on to say that film offers a comprehensive way to encapsulate the look, feel, and rhythm of a culture. Harmer (2001) summarises the benefits of video: it develops learners' cultural awareness by giving them an opportunity to look in situations far beyond their classroom; it enables learners to see language in use and thus facilitate comprehension; it can be very motivating and it gives learners a chance to create something memorable and enjoyable. However, he also warns that using video can cause the so-called 'nothing new' syndrome when the language teacher does not provide any video activities that are unique learning experiences. Harmer (ibid.) points out that poor quality tapes and disks, poor viewing conditions, the length of extracts and incompetent teacher can diminish successful use of video.

Teachers can also use *songs* and *realia* in order to convey knowledge about the target language country. It is believed that music can have a positive impact on learning. Furthermore, songs can depict issues and the times in history, illustrate cultural identity or promote unity (White & McCormack, 2006). Horn (2003, cited in White & McCormack, 2006) emphasises that there are a number of possibilities to use songs meaningfully for teaching purposes, but only when teachers are willing to translate popular culture into the dominant culture terminology. Students can become critically aware and they will be able to evaluate the artists' message when listeners acquire higher cognitive levels than those expected in standards-based curricula. *Realia*, objects from real life, can be also beneficial for culture instruction. Realia can make the learning experience more memorable and comprehensible by giving learners an opportunity to see, touch and smell the objects (*Realia*, 2008). According to Berwald (1987), one of the main advantages of realia is its direct connection to the target culture. Realia is not good only for teaching grammar and vocabulary, but also to point out cultural differences. The teacher can use souvenirs such as maps, postcards, bills, tickets, catalogues and menus for motivational purposes as visual aids and as objects to describe the customs and traditions of another country.

Authentic materials give learners at any level an opportunity to experience the target culture and language as it is used in real life by a native speaker. They help learners to develop their communicative ability and raise cultural awareness in a meaningful context.

The range of authentic sources for teaching culture in the language classroom is wide. However, Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) stress that the greatest benefit from them will only be

gained with careful planning by the teacher and by training students to extract appropriate information from the material.

Assessing the learning of culture

Most scholars (Fleming, 2006; Kadajas & Maanso, 2006; Steele, 2000) agree that assessment plays a significant role in education. According to Fleming (2006), it gives a wide audience information about the quality of teaching and learning. He believes that classroom teachers need regular information on how students' knowledge, understanding and skills are evolving in order to adjust their teaching and to decide what kind of feedback is required to improve learners' performance. In addition, school principals and policy makers require broader information on the quality of education in a school or country. Learners themselves are interested in knowing how they are progressing and how to enhance their performance though they may need to be protected from the potentially demotivating effects of negative assessment. Last, not least, parents need feedback in order to understand their children's achievements and limitations. Thus, all parties agree on the objective that assessment should help raise achievement and improve learning (Fleming, *ibid.*).

According to Kadajas & Maanso (2006), assessment in general influences and guides learners' and public's comprehension and evaluation of education, learning and teaching. Assessment demonstrates what kind of learning and what kind of results are valued.

The assessment of learning culture is a relatively new area in foreign language teaching. Steele (2000) claims that the objectives set for learners in a foreign language classroom may include a cultural component, but generally they are predominantly linguistic. Thus, when assessing learners' competence, teachers focus on the linguistic skills. The reason may lie on the fact that it is relatively easy to assess learners' linguistic skills and rather complicated to assess intercultural skills. Foreign language scholars (Davcheva & Docheva, 1998; Pulverness, 2004; Byram & Morgan, 1994) agree that assessing cultural learning is not an easy task, but by no means impossible.

Culture learning is the process of acquiring culture-specific and culture-general knowledge, skills and attitudes required for effective communication and interaction with people from other cultures (Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein & Colby, 2003). In other words, culture learning is the process of acquiring intercultural competence. However, when assessing culture learning scholars frequently omit the dimension of attitudes because they are not convinced that

classroom teachers should manipulate attitudes directly and systematically toward a specific culture (Lafayette, 1975). Byram & Morgan (1994) agree that assessment of attitudes involves some ethical issues. In addition, it is more complicated to measure changes in attitudes than skills and knowledge. The ways in which attitudes are encouraged and modified are often indirect: through context of presentation of information, through personality, interpersonal relations and credibility. Thus, when it comes to cultural learning, scholars often only mention the assessment of knowledge, skills and behaviour.

Davcheva and Docheva (1998) propose that the assessment of culture should be related to learners' performance in the classroom, to their behaviour in the local community or in different intercultural experiences. They bring forth what aspects of learners' achievements should be assessed. They highlight three learner abilities:

- the ability to explain their own and other people's opinions and choices;
- the ability to find out how the representatives of another society comprehend learners' own culture and how one's own society perceives other cultures;
- the ability to interact meaningfully with members of their own and of foreign cultures.

Davcheva and Docheva (1998) stress that cultural skills are mastered in a long-term, ongoing process and should be assessed accordingly. Long-term assessment gives teachers an opportunity to collect continuous evidence of learners' performance and hence to follow their progress. In addition, they also offer a variety of techniques for assessing cultural skills such as discussions, tutorials, roleplays (see p. 12), questionnaires and mind maps.

According to Lafayette and Schulz (1975), the assessment of culture learning should be viewed in terms of knowledge, understanding and behaviour. When assessing knowledge, teachers should assess learners' ability to recall, recognise and describe cultural information or pattern. The assessment of understanding should focus on their ability to explain cultural information or pattern. Learners need to comprehend a cultural pattern in terms of meaning, origin and interrelationship within the larger cultural context. The latter presupposes not only factual knowledge, but also applies to reasoning ability. Knowledge and understanding can be tested by simple pencil-paper tests (multiple-choice, listings, descriptions, discussions, comparisons, etc.). When assessing behaviour, teachers should assess learners' ability to use cultural information and pattern. The latter refers to behavioural skills such as the ability to act unobtrusively, meaningfully and unoffensively in real or simulated cultural situations.

Behavioural skills can be tested for example by simulation (see pp. 12-13) or a series of open-ended situations where learners must listen and react to instructions on a tape.

Pulverness (2004) emphasises that when assessing cultural learning, teachers must find a way of assessment which takes into account both factual knowledge and cultural skills. Assessment of knowledge is relatively easy and therefore, can be assessed in traditional ways. The assessment of behaviour and attitudes is quite difficult and therefore other ways of assessment must be taken into consideration. Damen (1987, cited in Paige et al., 2003) highlights four types of assessment for cultural skills: enactments (such as role-plays or simulations), productions of materials (essays or letters), self-report and observation by the teacher or other peers when the learner is demonstrating specific cultural skill.

Many of the assessment tools proposed by scholars are actually also culture teaching techniques. Cultural minidramas, critical incidents, culture assimilators (see p.12), simulation (see pp. 12-13) and documents originating from a foreign culture can be used effectively for culture instruction but also for assessment purposes (Sercu, 2004). Yet, the aforementioned techniques are not very widespread in European language classrooms. More recently scholars have distributed the idea to use the European Language Portfolio. The latter gives learners an opportunity for self-assessment of intercultural competence.

The current situation in a foreign language classroom favours strongly the assessment of linguistic proficiency. The assessment of cultural learning is frequently ignored because of the number of difficulties it brings along. However, when teachers claim that the main goal of foreign language teaching is the development of intercultural communicative competence, then assessment of cultural learning must be implemented. In addition, Sercu (2004) claims that assessment of culture learning is also significant because of the backwash effect it has on teaching. Teachers tend to teach what will be tested. Thus, if culture learning assessment is skipped, then most probably the teaching of it is not given full importance.

It has been commonly agreed that proper foreign language instruction must also embrace the study of culture. Students cannot truly master the language if they do not know anything about the people who speak the target language or the country in which the language is spoken. Culture instruction should start on the first days of foreign language learning and continue till the end of it. In addition, teachers should use appropriate techniques and activities as well as authentic and up-to-date material in order to make learning culture interesting and develop

learners' intercultural competence. As a basis for intercultural competence, learners need to acquire knowledge of the target language country. However, teaching cultural knowledge should not be a mere acquisition of facts, but it should help learners to develop a framework in order to communicate and to enhance the understanding of another culture. Thus, cultural knowledge is an essential component in gaining competence in foreign language learning.

Neither the teaching of culture nor learners' cultural knowledge has been a fully researched area in Estonia. Earlier studies have been conducted by Saluveer (2004) about teaching culture in English classes in Estonian secondary schools. Her study revealed teachers' and learners' opinions of different aspects of culture instruction as well as learners' cultural knowledge of Britain. Skopinskaja (2003) and Liiv (2004) have both carried out a study that deals with the cultural content of foreign language textbooks. A similar research was conducted by Hille Kruus (2007) in Tartu University. In her master's thesis she examined culture-related topics in "I Love English" and "Welcome" textbooks. No research so far has been conducted into young learners' cultural knowledge. Therefore, the present study aims at finding out what students who have studied English for four years know about different English speaking countries.

The present research put forward the following tasks:

1. to examine to what extent learners' cultural knowledge meets the requirements of the Estonian National Curriculum (*Põhikooli ja gümnaasiumi...*, 2002, 2010);
2. to find out the aspects of culture in which learners are the most knowledgeable;
3. to compare girls' and boys' knowledge of English speaking countries.

Method

Procedure and research instrument

Data for the empirical study were collected by a test in English (see Appendix 4). The questions were chosen according to the requirements of the Estonian National Curriculum (*Põhikooli ja gümnaasiumi...*, 2002, 2010) as well as to some suggestions given in *Riiklike õppekavade materjale* (2006). In addition, culture-related information in English language textbooks used at primary schools was also considered when compiling the test.

The test was divided into four broad categories: general information (Q 1, 2, 8, 12), geography (Q 7), national symbols (Q 3, 4, 5, 6) and holidays (Q 9, 10, 11). It included questions about the United Kingdom, the USA, Canada, Australia, Ireland and New Zealand.

The test comprised 12 tasks of four different types of questions: five open-ended questions (Q 4, 5, 7, 11, 12), three multiple-choice questions (Q 1, 8, 9), two matching tasks (Q 6, 10), one true/ false question and one matching task with an open-ended question (Q 3). Short open-ended questions were chosen because they are the only questions in the test that assess unassisted recall of information, rather than recognition. In addition, they are relatively easy to answer compared to essay questions. Multiple-choice questions were considered because they are the most versatile of the close-ended question types and the probability of student guessing is relatively low (50%) (UW Teaching Academy, n.d.). Matching tasks, on the other hand, were suitable for this test because they can assess a large amount of information in a confined space. True/ false questions were chosen because they are the easiest to write and score. Each correct answer was worth one point.

To determine the reliability of the test the Cronbach alfa was calculated. It showed that the test is reliable ($\alpha = 0.84$).

The test answers were coded and entered into Microsoft Excel. Data analysis was conducted with the SPSS statistical software (version 17.0). To determine whether there were any statistically significant differences between the boys` and girl` answers t-tests were conducted. To determine whether there were any statistically significant differences in the aspects of culture the means and the 95% confidence intervals for the means were compared.

Sample

The test was administered by the author in 17 classes in seven different schools in Tartu. The students took the test during their English lesson. The classes were chosen according to the average number (four) of English lessons a week. 275 students who had been learning English for four years took part in the study. The respondents were from the 5th and 6th grade because the former had started learning English in their second year and the latter, in their third year. 137 (50%) students were from the 5th grade and 138 students (50%) were from the 6th grade. There were 142 (52%) female and 133 (48%) male respondents. In order to give more informative

feedback to the students and teachers, the respondents were asked to provide their name and grade.

Results

The possible maximum score for the test was 41 points. The maximum score achieved in the test was 40 (98%) and the minimum, 14 (34%). The average score was 28 (69%). The mean, minimum and maximum scores as well as standard deviations are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *The students' scores*

	Number	Min	Max	Mean	SD
All	275	14	40	27,92	5,807
Boys	133	14	40	26,92	5,824
Girls	142	14	39	28,86	5,563

Note: SD = standard deviation

The girls scored higher than the boys and the difference was statistically significant. The latter was proved by the t-test ($p = 0.05$, $t = 2.8$). The dispersion of the scores is presented in Figure 1.

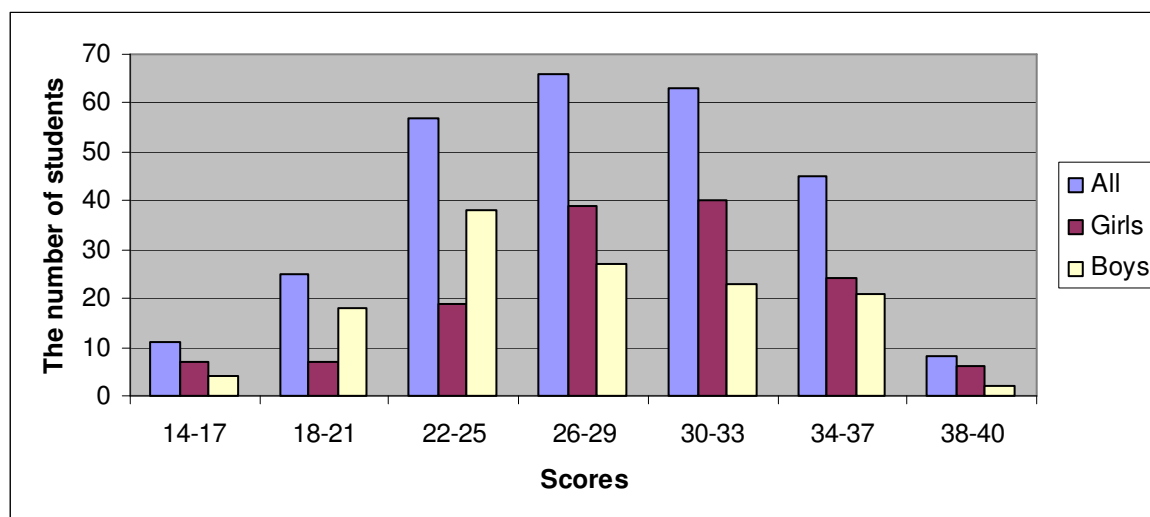


Figure 1. *The number of students according to the scores*

The students performed best in some questions about general information as well as in some questions about the symbols and holidays of English speaking countries. Most respondents scored highly in the task where they had to decide whether the given statements about English

speaking countries were true or false (Q2). So, 264 (96%) students knew that *there were no skyscrapers in Ireland* (Q 2.3). 262 (95%) students agreed that *Australia is known for its varied landscape* (Q 2.2). The number of respondents who knew that *the USA is known for its donuts and diners* (Q 2.4) was 256 (93%). 246 (90%) students knew that the statement *Canada has warm and sunny climate* was incorrect (Q 2.5). The number of those who knew that *in New Zealand there are more sheep than people* (Q 2.1) was 245 (89%). This task (Q 2) also showed statistically significant differences in the correct responses of the girls and boys ($p = 0.03$, $t = 2.9$). The percentage of the girls who gave correct answers to all the given statements was 89. Among the boys the percentage was smaller - 79.

The number of respondents who knew that English is the first language in *Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland* and *the USA* (Q1) was 91 (33%). This question showed statistically significant differences in the girls' and boys' answers. The latter was proved by the t-test ($p = 0.03$, $t = 2.2$). While 37 % of the girls were able to identify all English speaking countries in the given list, the corresponding percentage for boys was 29%. Canada and Ireland were the least known. The former was considered as an English speaking country by 178 (65%) and the latter by 145 (53%) students. As expected the United Kingdom and the USA were known to most respondents with 260 (95%) and 226 (82%) correct answers accordingly. However, there were a number of students who believed that *Denmark* (12) and *Germany* (10) were English speaking countries. The dispersion of the correct answers is shown in Figure 2.

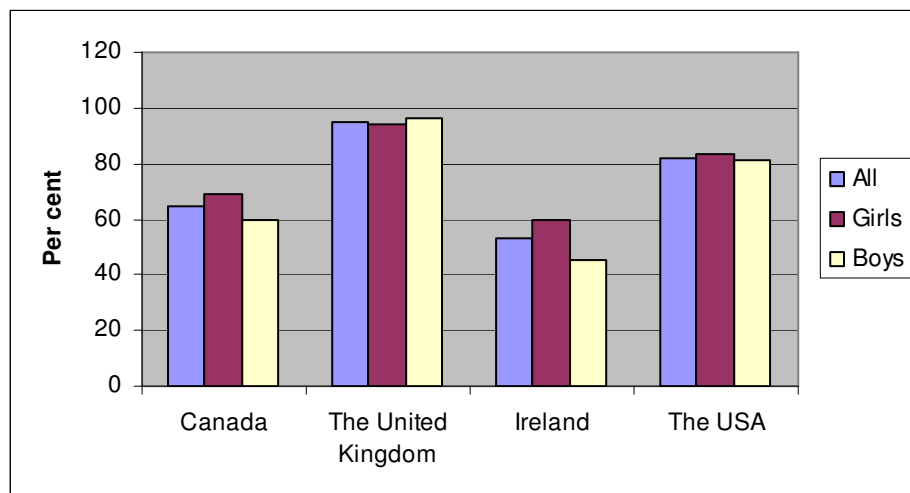


Figure 2. *The students' knowledge about the countries where English is spoken as a first language*

The symbols of English speaking countries (Q 3) were relatively well-known (Figure 3). In this task the students had to match the symbols with the countries. In addition, the respondents were asked to choose one symbol and write about it in a few words. The best-known symbol was *Big Ben*, which 250 (91%) students connected with the United Kingdom. The rest associated *Big Ben* mainly with the USA and one student with Ireland. Most frequently, the respondents (42%) chose *Big Ben* to write about. In most cases, the students wrote that *Big Ben is a famous clock tower in London*. Some students added that *it is next to the river Thames and the Parliament House*. 242 (89%) respondents knew that *the maple leaf* is the symbol of Canada. However, it was also associated with all the other countries in the given list. 31 learners (11%) chose to describe the *maple leaf*. The most common comment was *a red maple leaf is on the flag of Canada*. Students also wrote that *the maple tree is the national plant of Canada* and that *it is used to make maple syrup*. Three-quarters of the students (207) knew the American symbol *bald eagle* and the Irish symbol *shamrock*. Nevertheless, both were also associated with the other countries in the given list. 20 (7%) respondents knew that *the bald eagle is the national bird of the USA* and that *it can be found on the dollar*. One learner added that it was also *the symbol of the Astecs and that first Astec settlers found an eagle on the plant with a snake in its mouth*. In addition, the *bald eagle* was described as *a big, strong and evil bird*. 10 (4%) students wrote about the *shamrock* in a few words, saying that *it is the national plant of Ireland and it brings luck*. It was also mentioned that *it is a symbol of St. Patrick's Day*. The Australian symbol the *coala* was recognised by 191 (70%) respondents. It was also associated with the other countries in the given list. 25 (9%) learners brought out that *the coala likes to eat the leaves of the eucalyptus tree* and that *it sleeps a lot as well as climbs on trees*. It was also described as *a rare animal who lives only in Australia* or as *a grey hairy animal with a big black nose*. The *kiwi* was the least-known symbol. Only 179 (65%) students linked it with New Zealand. Similarly to other symbols it was also connected with the other countries in the given list. Some students knew that *it is the national bird of New Zealand who cannot fly*.

In this task (Q 3) the girls knew the symbols better than the boys and the difference was statistically significant. The latter was proved by the t-test ($p = 0.026$, $t = 2.2$).

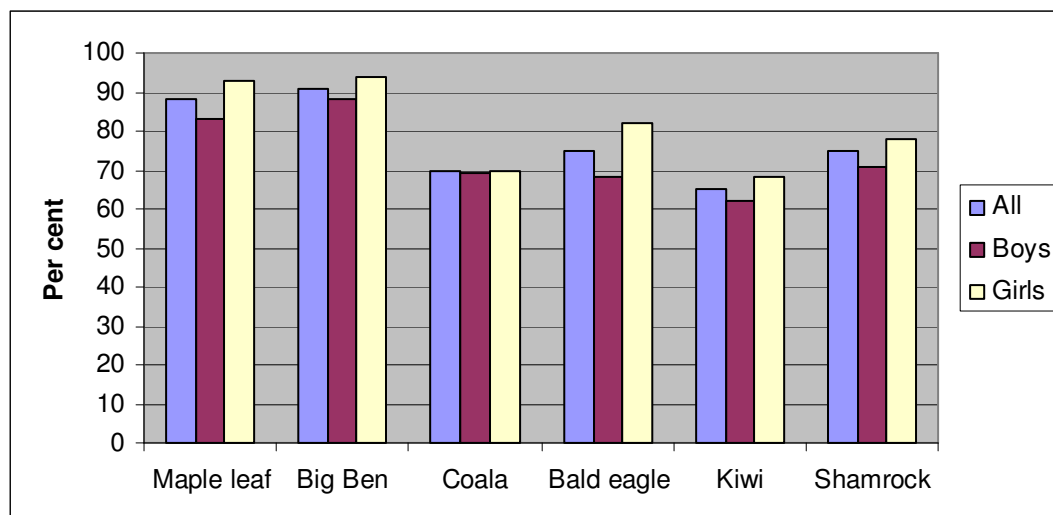


Figure 3. *The students' knowledge about the symbols*

The students were quite familiar with the flags of English speaking countries (Q 4). *The Canadian flag* was known the best with 271 (98%) correct responses. The number of those who recognised *the flag of the USA* was 259 (94%). However, it was also believed to be the flag of the United Kingdom (10) and New Zealand (1). Suprisingly, only 181 (66%) respondents recognised *the flag of the United Kingdom*. It was thought to be the flag of England (75), the USA (8), Australia (2), Ireland (1), New Zealand (1) and even Norway (1). In this task (Q 4) the girls performed better than the boys and the difference was statistically significant ($p = 0.011$, $t = 2.6$). While 72 % of the girls provided correct answers for all the flags, the corresponding percentage for the boys was 56. As the flag of the United Kingdom was the least known among the flags, it is not surprising that only 72 (26%) students knew that the it is called the Union Jack (Q 5).

The respondents seemed to be quite knowledgeable about the British monarchy (Q 8). 241 (88%) students knew that the present Queen of the United Kingdom is *Elizabeth II*. Nevertheless, there was a number of respondents who believed that the present Queen was *Elizabeth I* (13), *Charles* (8) and *Henry III* (2).

Easter traditions in Estonia and Britain (Q 10) were also well known among the students. The most familiar British tradition was *eating hot cross buns on Good Friday* - 252 (92%) students gave the correct answer. The number of those who knew that people in Estonia *wrap eggs in onion skin and boil them* was 238 (87%). Three-quarters of the respondents (207) recognised the British tradition of *children looking for chocolate eggs in the house or garden*.

The least-known tradition was the Estonian custom of *cracking eggs on Easter Sunday* as only 186 (68%) students provided the correct answer.

Not surprisingly, most of the students recognised *Halloween* (Q 11.1). Here the number of correct responses was 243 (88%). As it was an open-ended question, 13 names were suggested for this holiday such as *Trick or Treat* (3), *Spring* (2), *Pumpkin`s Day* (2) and *Valentines day* (2).

While Easter traditions and Halloween were quite well known among the students, their knowledge of other holidays was not so good. For example, only a little more than half of the students (56%) knew that the national day of the USA was on *4th of July* (Q 9). At the same time some other dates, e.g. *2nd of March* (26), *2nd of January* (31) and *4th of September* (53) were suggested. Only 57 (21%) of the respondents had heard of *St. Patrick`s Day* (Q 11.2). It appeared that the girls knew that holiday better than the boys, with 26% of correct answer compared to 15% given by the boys. The difference was statistically significant and proved by the t-test ($p = 0.038$, $t = 2.1$). At the same time the students suggested 27 names for this holiday such as *Independence day* (21), *Green day* (10), *Christmas* (5), *Summer* (4), *Easter* (3), *Leprechaun day* (3), *Saint Lucia`s Day* (3), *Shamrock Day* (3), *Thanksgiving* (2) and *Irish day* (2).

Recognising the national plants of the United Kingdom (Q 11) turned out to be a relatively difficult task. In this task the students were asked to match the countries with the given plants. The best-known were the national plants of England and Northern Ireland. 156 (57%) students knew that the national plant of England is *the rose* and 153 (56%), that the national plant of Northern Ireland is *the shamrock*. The national plants of Wales and Scotland were less known. 131 (48%) knew *the daffodil* as a symbol of Wales and 109 (40%), *the thistle* as the national plant of Scotland.

In the seventh task, the students had to write the names of the countries of the United Kingdom as well as their capitals according to numbers on a map. England and its capital London were shown as an example. The respondents` knowledge about the parts of the United Kingdom depended on the country (Figure 4). *Scotland* was the best-known country of the United Kingdom with 191 (70%) correct responses. However, the names of other countries such as *Wales* (20), *Canada* (6), *Ireland* (6), *the USA* (3), *Germany* (3) were suggested. The number of those who knew that the capital of Scotland is *Edinburgh* was 92 (34%). In addition, the students provided ten names for it such as *Cardiff* (4), *Dublin* (3), *Scotland* (2) and *Denmark* (2). 172 (63%) respondents knew where *Wales* was on the map. The rest believed that it was *Ireland* (24),

Northern Ireland (3), *Britain* (1), *Canada* (1), *Great Britain* (1) and *France* (1). Only 41 (15%) students knew that the capital of Wales is *Cardiff*. Some believed it was *Wales* (7), *Edinburgh* (6), *Dublin* (4) and *Belfast* (3). The least-known country of the United Kingdom turned out to be *Northern Ireland*. Only 73 (27%) respondents knew it. Northern Ireland was most frequently thought to be *Ireland* (109), followed by *Wales* (26) and *Scotland* (9). 22 (8%) students knew that the capital of Northern Ireland is *Belfast*. The rest believed that it was *Dublin* (26), *Cardiff* (8), *Edinburgh* (5) and *Ireland* (2). The students' knowledge of the capitals is shown on Figure 5.

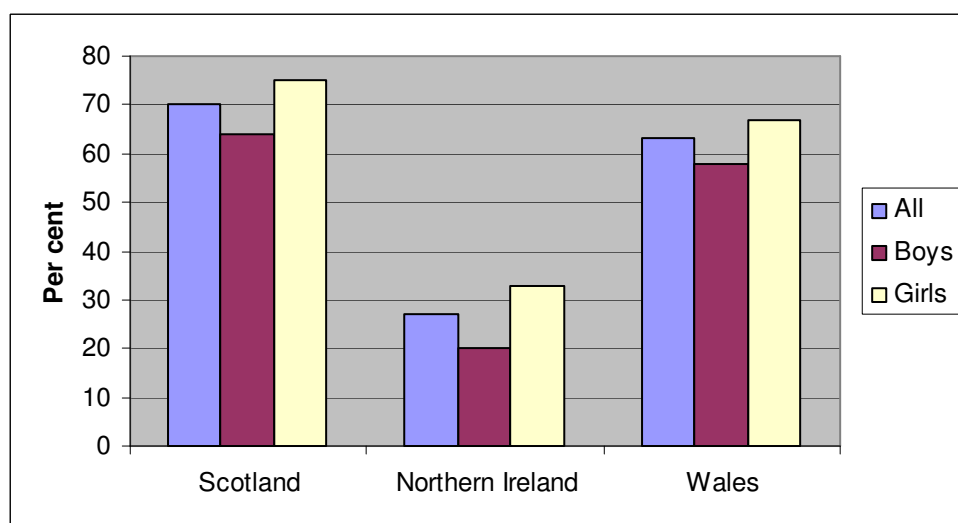


Figure 4. The students' knowledge about the countries of the United Kingdom.

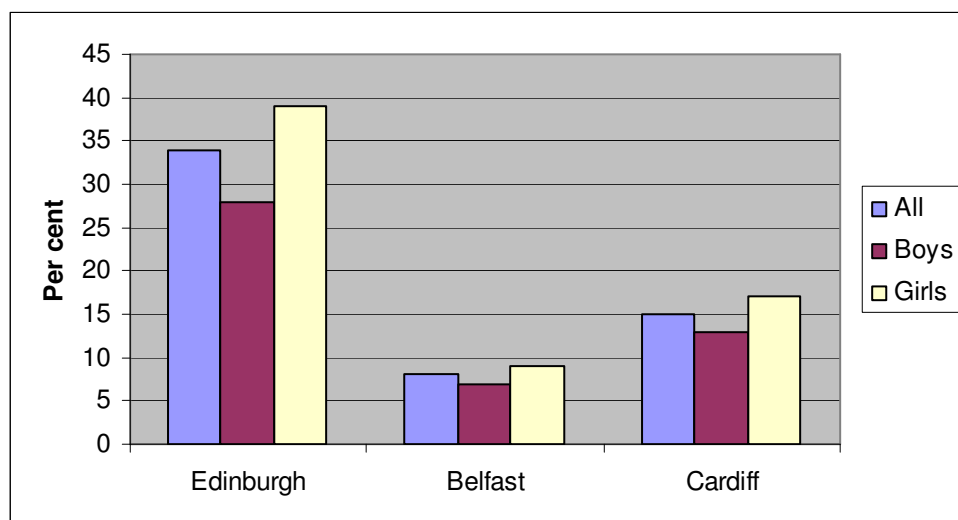


Figure 5. The students' knowledge about the capitals of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales

The girls did better in this task (Q 7) than the boys. The difference was statistically significant and it was proved by the t-test ($p = 0.017$, $t = 2.4$).

In the last task (Q 12) the students had to read a text about New Zealand and recognise the country. The number of those who answered correctly was 57 (21%). The rest provided 22 different names for it such as *Ireland* (41), *Australia* (29), *Island* (17), *Island country in the Southwest Pacific Ocean* (14), *Canada* (9), *the USA* (7), *Polynesia* (4).

Overall, the respondents knew best some general information about English speaking countries, followed by the holidays and symbols. At the same time, their knowledge of geographical features was not so good as might have expected. The means and the 95% confidence intervals for the means were compared in order to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between the aspects of culture. The 95% confidence intervals for the means did not coincide and thus, the difference between the aspects of culture was statistically significant. The means, 95% confidence intervals for the means as well as standard deviations are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *The means and 95 % confidence intervals for means of the aspects of culture*

	M	95 % Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	SD
General information	,7589		,7383	,7795	,17344
Holidays	,6527		,6259	,6794	,22526
Symbols	,5983		,5744	,6222	,20116
Geography	,3579		,3229	,3930	,29540

Note: SD = Standard Deviation M = Mean

Discussion

Assessing the learning of culture is an extremely difficult task. First, there is no consensus on what aspects of culture should and can be assessed. Second, it is complicated to find proper methods for assessing the different aspects of culture. However, it is quite easy to assess knowledge because it can be done by a traditional test. Knowledge about the target language country is required for acquiring accurate cultural skills as well as behaviour and thus, it should

not be underestimated. Therefore, in the present study it was considered important to find out what the students of the fifth and sixth grades knew about different English speaking countries.

The first research question examined to what extent the learners' knowledge met the requirements of the Estonian National Curriculum (*Põhikooli ja gümnaasiumi...*, 2002, 2010). As in the first and second school stages students should be introduced to some factual information about the target language countries (e.g. general information, holidays and symbols), a test was chosen as a means of checking their knowledge.

The respondents answered well to the question which contained some general information of various English speaking countries with the percentage of correct answers being nearly 90. However, as the students only had to decide if the given statements were true or false, there is a relatively high probability that they guessed the right answer rather than actually knew it.

The majority of the students recognised most of the countries where English is spoken as a first language. However, it came as a surprise that almost half of the respondents (47%) did not consider Ireland as an English speaking country. The reason might be that there is too little information about Ireland in textbooks as the study by Kruus (2007) revealed.

At primary level students should also learn about holidays in English speaking countries. Not surprisingly, the respondents knew better the holidays that are celebrated around the world, such as Halloween and Easter. As the latter are quite popular holidays in Estonia as well, teachers might have introduced them more frequently than other holidays. Nevertheless, in the task about Easter traditions the students only had to decide if the tradition was common to Estonia or Britain and thus, it is highly possible that they guessed the right answers. At the same time the national days of the USA – the 4th of July and Ireland - St. Patrick's Day were less known as they are not international holidays and are mostly celebrated in the corresponding countries.

When it comes to the symbols, then the students knew quite well some of them, such as Big Ben, the maple leaf, bald eagle and shamrock. At the same time the koala and the kiwi as the icons of Australia and New Zealand were less known. The first three might have been known better because the textbooks include more information about the United Kingdom, Canada and the USA as the study by Kruus (2007) showed.

The question about the flags was also answered well. Although it might have been expected that the best known was the British flag, it turned out to be the Canadian. The latter is

distinctively different from the other because of the red maple leaf and thus, the learners might have found it easier to remember. It was not a surprise that most students recognised the American flag as it is frequently exposed through the media. Suprisingly, the flag of the United Kingdom turned out to be the least known. A considerable number (75) thought it was the flag of England. According to Davies (2000), it is a common mistake to use England to refer to the whole United Kingdom. It is believed that many people, even a number of British citizens, do not know the correct name of their country and do not make a difference between the whole and the constituent parts. Thus, it is no wonder that the students confused England with the United Kingdom. However, it was expected that the students knew the British flag better as most schools in Estonia teach British English and its symbols could be better known.

The respondents' knowledge of the national plants of the United Kingdom depended on the country. Suprisingly, in this task the number of the respondents who recognised the Irish symbol (shamrock) was smaller than in the third task where the students had to match the shamrock with the country. It could be that some respondents were not aware of its name in English. In addition, the students might have found questions with visual aids easier and more appealing than just plain reading tasks.

It can be concluded that generally the students' knowledge corresponds to the requirements of the Estonian National Curriculum (*Põhikooli ja gümnaasiumi...*, 2002, 2010), especially when taking into account that the average score of the test was 28 (69%). This was a positive result considering the earlier study carried out by Saluveer (2004). The latter showed that university and secondary school students' knowledge of Britain was rather limited. The main reason why the younger students did better might be that they have recently acquired knowledge about English speaking countries and thus, remember it better than older students. Furthermore, teachers of younger learners do not have to prepare them for the exams and thus, might devote more time for culture instruction.

The second research question examined in which aspects of culture the learners were the most knowledgeable. Overall, the students knew best general information. The latter had the highest mean of the aspects of culture ($M=0.76$, $SD=0.17$). This is an expected result as learning about another country usually starts from basic facts and information. As the study by Kruus (2007) showed the textbooks also contain enough material, so it might be relatively easy to teach. Furthermore, when administering the test in schools, it could be noticed that several classrooms

had a number of posters and pictures on the walls that included general information about English speaking countries. This is a positive discovery as according to Peck (1998), posters and pictures can help students to develop a mental image of the target language country. They can also be very motivating for learning (Berwald, 1978). Judging by the number of correct responses, it seems that the teachers have exploited these visual aids effectively. In addition, the students might have acquired some information through other subjects such as history, geography and literature.

As holidays are generally represented in textbooks (Kruus, 2007) and also considered important in the Estonian National Curriculum (*Põhikooli ja gümnaasiumi...*, 2002, 2010), it is not very surprising that the students knew this aspect of culture well. The study carried out by Saluveer (2004) reached at the same result. It is relatively easy to find authentic material (e.g. films, realia, songs, etc.) as well as techniques (e.g. project work, the slice-of-life-technique, etc.) for teaching them. The teachers might also have celebrated holidays with their students, because it is a very suitable activity for younger learners and helps to bring authenticity to a foreign language classroom, which is encouraged by several scholars (Peck, 1998; Saluveer, 2004).

Compared to general information and holidays the respondents gave more wrong answers to the questions about symbols. The same appeared in the study by Saluveer (2004). As the Estonian National Curriculum (*Põhikooli ja gümnaasiumi...*, 2002, 2010) requires the knowledge of symbols and they are often introduced in textbooks, it is surprising that the students did not know them well. Furthermore, teaching symbols is quite easy. They can be taught by using, for example, the scavenger hunt (see p. 13), the project work (see p. 13) and the slice-of-life technique (see p. 13). In addition, the teachers can use realia (e.g. flags, national plants, etc.) as it can make the learning experience more memorable and comprehensible by giving learners an opportunity to see, touch and smell the objects (*Realia*, 2008).

The least-known aspect turned out to be geography. Although most of the classrooms had pictures and maps on the walls, the students were not able to determine the location of the countries on the map. Locating countries on the map also caused problems for the students in the study carried out by Saluveer (2004). Visual aids can be very helpful for learning but only if they are integrated with teaching. However, it seems that the teachers do not use maps regularly for instruction purposes and thus, use them mainly as decoration elements. Another explanation might be that the students are not very interested in geography as the study by Saluveer (2004)

revealed and therefore, they might be less motivated to acquire knowledge about this aspect of culture. However, it came as a surprise that some students did not make a difference between a country and its capital.

The third research question aimed at comparing the girls' and boys' knowledge about English speaking countries. Overall, the girls demonstrated better knowledge than the boys. This was also proved by the t-test. They gave more correct answers to general statements about the countries and knew better in which countries English was spoken as a first language. The same applied to knowledge of most symbols, holidays and geography. However, statistically significant differences were not found in questions about some symbols such as the Union Jack and the national plants as well as in questions about some holidays such as Easter and Halloween.

Foreign language researchers have generally found sex differences favouring females in most areas of language acquisition (Oxford, 1996, cited in Kaylani, 1996). According to Eccles (1988, cited in Kaylani, 1996), social forces such as parental attitude and gender-related cultural beliefs affect students' expectations for success, and consequently their motivation. Kaylani (1996) believes that if foreign language is thought to be a women's subject, it may influence the motivation of male students to achieve. In addition, as the majority of the foreign language teachers are female, they might be a more positive role model for girls than for the boys.

Another explanation might be that the girls are more interested in the tested aspects of culture and thus, more motivated to learn. The study carried out by Saluveer (2004) also indicated that the girls were more interested in topics such as national symbols, customs and festivals than the boys.

There are some limitations to the present study. First, the sample of the study is too small to make generalisations. Second, tests like this can never measure the level of knowledge accurately because there is always a high possibility of guessing the right answers. The latter applies especially to true/ false and multiple-choice questions. Thus, in order to get a more reliable result, interviews with the students and teachers as well as observations of some culture-related activities could have been carried out.

Nevertheless, the research can be useful for foreign language teachers. The study revealed the aspects of culture in which the learners showed limited knowledge. Teachers could use this

information in order to improve their culture instruction. In addition, it came out that the students had more difficulties with exercises that required reading and comprehension. Thus, teachers should give their learners more tasks to practice these skills.

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Appendix 1

Suggestions for culture-related topics for the new Estonian National Curriculum

Riiklike õppekavade materjale, 2006

3. klass

Suurbritannia ja Londoni tutvustamine video ning pildimaterjali vahendusel; kuninganna Elizabeth II.

Parlamendihoone, Big Ben; the Tower. Uhendkuningriigi lipp (*Union Jack*).

Vanasonad ja *nursery rhymes*, nt *Hickory, Dickory, Dock*; *Humpty Dumpty*.

Lastelaulud, nt “ABC”, “Happy Birthday”, “What is your name?”, “Bingo”, “Head and shoulders”, “10 little

Indians”, “London Bridge is falling Down”, “Put your finger on your nose”, “Old McDonald”.

Viisakas poordumine (tervitamine, tanamine jne). Uldine tutvumine perekonnateemaga.

4. klass

Inglise keelt konelevad maad. Inglismaa, Šotimaa, Iirimaa ja Wales (asukohad, pealinnad, sumboolika).

Pildimaterjal ja videod USA ning Washingtoni kohta: Kapitoorium, Vabaduse sammas; USA lipp (*Stars and*

Stripes), USA president.

Vanasonad, konekaanud, luuletused, nt *Two Little Kittens*, *The Bells of spring*, *This is the Barn that Jack*

Built.

Laulud, nt “If you ‘re happy”, “My Bonnie”, “Jingle Bells”.

Muinasjutud, nt “The Little Red Riding Hood”, “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs”, “Chicken Little”.

Uldine tutvumine vaba aja teemaga.

5. klass

Suurbritannia ja USA humni meloodia; London ja Washington (pildimaterjal, nt St. Paul’s Cathedral,

Buckingham Palace, Kapitoorium, Valge maja); looduskaunid paigad (maed, jarved).

Folkloor ja valmid; vanasonad, *tongue twisters*.

Lood, nt R. Kipling, “Mowgli”, “Rikki-Tikki-Tavi”; L. Carroll “Alice imedemaal”

Luuletused, laulud, nt “Twinkle-twinkle”, “Little Star”, “She’ll be coming round the mountains”, “Rudolf, the Rednosed Reindeer”.

Inglise ja Ameerika paritolu tooted ning kaubamargid.

Uldine tutvumine Inglise/Ameerika koolieluga.

6. klass

Inglismaa ajaloost (sisserannanud hoimud, rahvuse kujunemine); kuninglik perekond.

Ameerika poliselanikud ja avastamine eurooplaste poolt; USA president.

Valmid, legendid, limerikid.

Jutud, nt M. Twain, “Tom Sawyer”; D. Defoe, “Robinson Crusoe”; A. Sewell, “The Black Beauty”.

Luuletused, laulud, nt R. Stevenson, “My Bed is a Boat”; R. Burns, “My Heart’s in the Highlands”; “Clementine”,

“Greensleeves”, “White Christmas”.

Inglismaa ja Ameerika tuntud sportlasi. Uldine tutvumine tervislike eluviisidega.

Appendix 2

Topics for teaching culture by Nelson Brooks

(1986, pp. 124-128)

Greetings, friendly exchanges, farewells. How do friends meet, converse briefly, take their leave? What are the perennial topics of small talk? How are strangers introduced?

The morphology of personal exchange. How are interpersonal relationships such as differences in age, degree of intimacy, social position, and emotional tension reflected in the choice of appropriate forms of pronouns and verbs.

Levels of speech. In what ways are age, provenance, social status, academic achievement, degree of formality, interpersonal relations, aesthetic concern, and personality reflected in the standard or traditional speech?

Patterns of politeness. What are the commonest formulas of politeness and when should they be used?

Respect. Apart from overt expressions of deference and discipline, what personages and what cultural themes, both past and contemporary, are characteristically held in sincere respect?

Intonation patterns. Apart from the selection, order, and form of words themselves, what overtones of cadence, interrogation, command, surprise, deference, and the like are borne exclusively by the dynamics of pronunciation?

Contractions and omissions. What words and intonation patterns are commonly used to enliven one's speech by way of commentary upon one's own feelings or actions, those of the persons addressed, or the nature of behaviour of other elements in the immediate situation?

Types of error in speech and their importance. What errors is the speaker of English likely to make in the new language? What is the relative seriousness of their errors in the new culture? (For example, in French, a mistake in the gender of a noun is deeply disturbing, but the failure to make a past participle agree, if noticed at all, is readily condoned.)

Verbal taboos. What common words or expressions in English have direct equivalents that are tolerated in the new culture, and vice versa?

Written and spoken language. Aside from richness of vocabulary and complexity of structure, what are the commonest areas of difference between spoken language and writing?

Numbers. How are numbers pronounced, spelled, represented in arithmetical notation, written by hand, and formally printed in ways that are peculiar to the new culture?

Folklore. What myths, stories, traditions, legends, customs, and beliefs, are universally found among the common people?

Childhood literature. What lyrics, rhymes, songs, and jingles of distinct aesthetic merit are learned by all children?

Discipline. What are the norms of the discipline in the home, in school, in public places, in the military, in pastimes, and in ceremonies?

Festivals. What days of the calendar year are officially designated as national festivals? What are the central themes of these occasions and what is the manner of their celebration?

Holidays. What is the usual rhythm of work days and days off? What do young people do with their days off?

Observance of Sunday. How does Sunday differ from weekdays with regard to what and individual does or does not do, may or may not do?

Games. What are the most popular games that are played outdoors, indoors, by the young, by adults?

Music. What opportunities are offered the individual for training and practice in vocal and instrumental music?

Errands. What are typical errands that a young person is likely to be asked to do, either at home or in school?

Pets. What animals are habitually received into the home as pets? What is their role in the household?

Telephone. What phrases and procedures are conventional in the use of the telephone? What is the role of the private telephone in the home? Where are the public telephones to be found and how is the service paid for?

Comradeship. How are friendships and personal attachments likely to be formed and what provisions are made for fostering comradeship through clubs, societies, and other group organizations?

Personal possessions. What objects are often found decorating the bureau and walls of a young person's bedroom? What articles are likely to be discovered in a boy's pocket or a girl's handbag?

Keeping warm and cool. What changes in clothing, heating, ventilation, food, and drink are made because of variations of temperatur

Cleanliness. What is the relation between plumbing and personal cleanliness? What standards of public hygiene and sanitation are generally observed?

Cosmetics. What are the special conditions of age, sex, activity, and situation under which make-up is permitted, encouraged, or required?

Tobacco and smoking. Who smokes, what, and under what circumstances? What are the prevailing attitudes towards smoking? Where are tobacco products obtained?

Medicine and doctors. What are the common home remedies for minor ailments? What is the equivalent of the American drugstore? How does one obtain the services of physician?

Competitions. In what fields of activity are prizes awarded for success in open competition? How important is competition in schools, in the business world, in the professions?

Appointments. How are the appointments for business and pleasure made? What are the usual meeting places? How important is punctuality?

Invitations and dates. What invitations are young people likely to extend and receive? What formalities are involved? What is the counterpart of “dating” in the United States?

Traffic. How does vehicular traffic affect the pedestrian? What are the equivalents of traffic lights, road signs, crosswalks, safety islands, parking meters, hitchhiking?

Owning, repairing, and driving cars. Are young people interested in gasoline motors? Are they knowledgeable about them? What is the role of the car in family life? What are the requirements for obtaining a license to drive?

Science. How has modern science affected daily living, inner thought, conversation, reading matter?

Gadgets. What mechanical devices are commonly found in personal use, in the home, in stores, and in travel?

Sports. What organized and professional sports are the most popular and most generally presented for the public?

Radio and television programs. How general is the use of radio and television and what types of programs are offered, especially for young people?

Books. What are the facts of special interest concerning the printing, punctuation, binding, selling, and popularity of books.

Other reading matters. In addition to books, what types of reading matter, such as newspaper, weeklies, magazines, and reviews, are generally available and where can they be bought and consulted?

Hobbies. In what individual hobbies are young people likely to engage?

Learning in school. What is the importance of homework in formal education? What is taught at home by older members of the family?

Penmanship. What styles of handwriting are generally taught and used? What kinds of writing tools are available at home, in school, in public places? What are the conventions concerning the writing of dates, the using of margins, the signing of names?

Letter writing and mailing. How do letters customarily begin and end? How are envelopes addressed? Are there typical kinds of personal stationery? Where are stamps bought? Where are mailboxes found?

Family meals. What meals are usually served en famille? What is the special character of each meal, the food eaten, the seating arrangement, the method of serving dishes, the general conversation?

Meals away from home. Where does one eat when not at home? What are the equivalents of our lunchrooms, cafeterias, dining halls, lunch counters, wayside inns, restaurants?

Soft drinks and alcohol. What types of nonalcoholic beverages are usually consumed by young people and adults? What is the attitude towards the use of beer, wine, and spirits? What alcoholic drinks are in frequent use at home and in public?

Snacks and between-meal eating. Apart from the normal trio of daily meals, what pauses for eating or drinking are generally observed? What is the customary hour and the usual fare?

Cafes, bars, and restaurants. What types of cafes, bars, and restaurants are found how do they vary in respectability?

Yards, lawn, and sidewalks. What are the equivalents of American back yards, front lawns, and sidewalks in residential and business areas? What is their importance in the activities of young people?

Parks and playgrounds. Where are parks and playgrounds located and with what special features or equipment are they likely to be provided?

Flowers and gardens. Of what interest and importance are flower shops, house plants, gardens for flowers and vegetables in town and in the country?

Movies and theatres. Where are moving picture houses and theatres to be found? What procedures are involved in securing tickets and being seated? What can be said about the quality and popular appeal of the entertainment?

Races, circus, rodeo. What outdoor events are in vogue that correspond to our auto or horse races, circuses, and similar spectacles?

Museums, exhibitions, and zoos. What types of museums, exhibitions, and animal displays are generally provided and what is their role in the education of the young and recreation and enjoyment of adults?

Getting from place to place. What facilities for travel are provided for short distances about town or from one city or part of the country to another, by bus, rail, or airplane?

Contrasts in town and country life. What are some of the notable differences in dwellings, clothing, manners, shopping facilities, public utilities, when life in town is compared with life in the country?

Vacation and resort areas. What areas have special climate, scenery, or other natural features that make them attractive for vacation?

Camping and hiking. How popular are summer camps, camping, hiking, and cycling trips, and what organizations are especially interested in their promotion?

Saving accounts and thrift. In what way do banks or other organisations provide for the deposit of small amounts of money by individuals? To what extent and in what ways are young people encouraged to practice thrift?

Odd jobs and earning power. What kinds of chores and odd jobs are young people expected or permitted to do? If these are paid for, how is the individual reimbursed? To what extent are regular paying jobs made available to younger persons?

Careers. What careers are strong appeal for the young? How important is parental example and advice in the choice of career? What financial help is likely to be forthcoming for those who choose a career demanding long preparation?

Appendix 3

Suggestions for the minimum content of teaching culture by Byram

(1994, pp.51-52)

Social identity and social groups: groups within the nation-state which are the basis for other than national identity, including social class, regional identity, ethnic minority, professional identity, and which illustrate the complexity of individuals' social identities and of a national society (NB the issue of national identity is dealt with under 'stereotypes');

Social interaction: conventions of verbal and non-verbal behaviour in social interaction at differing levels of familiarity, as outsider and insider within social group;

Belief and behaviour: routine and taken-for-granted actions within social group – national or sub-national – and the moral and religious beliefs which are embodied within them; secondly, routines of behaviour taken from daily life which are not seen as significant markers of the identity of the group;

Socio-political institutions: institutions of the state – and the values and meanings they embody – which characterise the state and its citizens and which constitute a framework for ordinary, routine life within the national and sub-national groups; provision for health-care, for law and order, for social security, for local government, etc;

Socialisation and the life-cycle: institutions of socialisation – families, schools, employment, religion, military service – and the ceremonies which mark passage through stages of social life; representation of divergent practices in different social groups as well as national auto-stereotypes of expectations and shared interpretations;

National history: periods and events, historical and contemporary, which are significant in the constitution of the nation and its identity – both actually significant and, not necessarily identical, perceived as such by its members;

National geography: geographical factors within the national boundaries which are significant in members' perceptions of their country; other factors which are information (known but not significant to members) essential to outsiders in intercultural communication (NB national boundaries, and changes in them, are part of 'national history');

National cultural heritage: cultural artefacts perceived to be emblems and embodiments of national culture from past and present; in particular those which are 'known' to members of the nation – e.g. Shakespeare in Britain, the Impressionists in France, Wagner in Germany – through

their inclusion in curricula of formal education; and also contemporary classics, not all of which have reached the school curriculum and some of which may be transient but significant, created by television and other media – e.g. Truffaut's films in France, Agatha Christie in Britain, Biermann's songs in Germany;

Stereotypes and national identity: for example, German and English notions of what is 'typically' German and English national identity; the origins of these notions – historical and contemporary – and comparisons among them; symbols of national identities and stereotypes and their meanings, e.g. famous monuments and people.

Appendix 4

English Speaking Countries

1. Estonian is the first language in Estonia. Do you know in which of these countries below English is the first language? Tick (✓) the correct boxes.

6p

- ✓ Canada
- ✓ The United Kingdom
- ✓ Denmark
- ✓ Ireland
- ✓ Germany
- ✓ USA

2. Every country is famous for something. Read through the statements about some English speaking countries and decide whether the statement is true (T) or false (F). You will get a name of an English speaking country from the correct answers.

5p

In New Zealand there are more sheep than people.	<u>T</u>	<u>F</u>
Australia is known for its varied landscape.	I	E
There are lots of skyscrapers in Ireland.	N	M
USA is known for its donuts and diners.	T	D
Canada has warm and sunny climate.	I	O
	E	A

The English speaking country is _ _ _ _ _ .

3. The kangaroo lives only in Australia and it is therefore the symbol of Australia. Do you know what pictures below represent the symbols of the USA, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Ireland? First, write the correct number into the box (above the picture). One example has been done for you. Second, choose one symbol and write about it in a few words.

7p

The USA (1), The United Kingdom (2), Australia (3), Canada (4), New Zealand (5), Ireland (6). ☐



Choose one symbol and write about it in a few words (do not choose the kangaroo).

.....

.....

.....

4. The flag is one of the most important symbols of a country. Write the name of the country under its flag.

3p



.....

.....

.....

5. Some flags have names. Which country's flag is called the Union Jack?

1p

.....

6. The corn flower is the national flower of Estonia. Choose the national flowers (plants) of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland from the following list: daffodil, shamrock, tulip, rose, thistle. There is one extra.

4p

The national flower of England is

The national flower of Wales is

The national flower of Scotland is

The national flower of Northern Ireland is

7. First, write the name of the country next to the correct number. Second, write the capitals of the countries.

6p



PARTS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

1 **England**

2.....

3.....

4.....

CAPITALS

1a **London**

2a.....

3a.....

4a.....

8. Some countries in the world have kings and queens. Do you know who the present Queen of the United Kingdom is? Tick (✓) the correct box.

1p

- ☐ Elizabeth I
- ☐ Elizabeth II
- ☐ Charles
- ☐ Henry VIII

9. Estonians celebrate their national day on the 24th of February. Do you know when the Americans celebrate their national day? Tick (✓) the correct box.

1p

- ✓ 2nd of March
- ✓ 2nd of January
- ✓ 4th of September
- ✓ 4th of July

10. Easter is a popular spring holiday in Estonia and Britain. Decide whether the Easter custom is common to Estonia (1) or Britain (2). One example has been done for you.

4p

- a) People put willow catkins in a vase. **1**
- b) On Good Friday people eat hot cross buns.
- c) People wrap eggs in onion skin and boil them.
- d) Children look for chocolate eggs in the house or garden.
- e) Egg cracking is a popular game on Easter Sunday.

11. Every country celebrates special days. Read the description of two holidays. Can you say what holidays these are?

2p

a) I opened the door and saw two witches, a ghost and a monster. They shouted: "Trick or treat!" I was so surprised that I did not know what to do. I heard my aunt's voice: "Give them some sweets. I do not want to find soap on the windows or a pin on the doorbell". I gave the children some chocolate bars and they ran away, laughing.

This holiday is called

b) This holiday honours a saint of Ireland. It is celebrated in many countries with parades, speeches, festive Irish dinners, Irish music and dances. A lot of people wear green on that day, so they don't get pinched. On that day you can see many tricolour flags, shamrocks and leprechauns in the streets.

** to honour – austama *to pinch – näpistama *festive - pidulik*

This holiday is called

12. Emily lives in an English speaking country. Read the description of her home country. Do you know in what country Emily lives?

1p

Hello! My name is Emily and I am 11 years old. I have a pet kiwi. The reason that I have a pet kiwi is because my parents are animal rescuers. They found this rare bird on the road. Now I am going to tell you little bit about my home country.

I live in an island country in the Southwest Pacific Ocean. The island is part of a large island group called Polynesia. Our country is made up of two main islands called the North Island and the South Island.

*If you come to visit, you will find that our country is very beautiful and *unique. You can find *snow-capped mountains, glaciers, green *lowlands, sandy beaches, lots of lakes and waterfalls and steaming volcanoes here.*

*glacier – liustik *unique – ainulaadne *snow-capped – lumega kaetud
*lowlands - tasandikud

Emily lives in

THANK YOU! ☺